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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions have the potential for creating and advancing programs for the betterment of society, but the programs should not be chosen haphazardly and without great thought. Universities, more specifically, can be involved in the areas of production of knowledge and research in domestic affairs, urban and environmental problems, issues of population growth and migration, poverty, and racism. Some guidelines for participating in such programs include: (1) universities should not enter into local political activities in such a way as to upset local power constellations; (2) user agencies and universities should hold each other accountable for the maintenance of high standards of performance; (3) universities should develop more imaginative approaches to the utilization of personnel; (4) universities should emphasize interdisciplinary research and interinstitutional collaboration; (5) universities should utilize discretion in the selection of affiliating user agencies; and (6) universities should readily accept those tasks that relate them symbiotically to their local and national communities. (HS)

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USER AGENCY POLICIES AND MECHANISMS FOR UTILIZING THE RESOURCES OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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User agencies and institutions of higher education have traditionally experienced difficulty in working together. Essentially, the difficulty arises because of the unnatural basis of their alliance. For the most part, user agencies are more organized, emphasize a somewhat rigid hierarchy of personnel, and are preoccupied with the applicability of immediate solutions to agency problem areas. On the other hand, universities are typically rather disorganized, have a history of institutional isolation from the problems of society, require a relatively long period of lead time in taking action, and focus primarily upon the development rather than the application of knowledge. In addition, the tendency to filter their perceptions through traditional university disciplines has on occasion severely compromised the effectiveness of university personnel in examining user agency problems which have a multi-disciplinary basis.

As a result of these differing orientations and operational styles, the task of building bridges between user agencies and universities is always likely to be difficult. But the potential rewards from such user agency-university affiliations are significant enough for us to work hard at establishing and maintaining these alliances. For in the transfer from discovery of knowledge to the application of that knowledge to the problems of our society, such an alliance between user agencies and universities has a potential for impact that would be impossible to achieve in those situations where the market place is the principal transmitter of innovation to application.

Given the potential benefits of, and the difficulty in, establishing close working relationships between user agencies and institutions of higher

education, the first function of this essay will be to describe several of the forces that are compelling universities into greater involvement with user agencies. The focus then turn, to a suggested division of labor whereby various institutions of higher education might examine their unique roles. Finally, the paper will discuss what universities should and should not do as they begin to develop affiliations with various user agencies.

Factors Influencing University Involvement

Assuming that universities have some basis for collaboration with user agencies, complex and uncertain as they may be, in what directions do they lie? The obvious attraction for university personnel today is the production of knowledge and research in domestic affairs, urban and environmental problems, issues of population growth and migration, poverty and racism.

The scene I know best is the urban one. Let me use it as an example in treating the agency-university involvement. There exists a distinguished tradition in the study of the history of cities, and there is fairly substantial literature on the governance of cities, their ecology, and their characteristic social organization. But, the total base is small. None of these academic specializations now provide a basis for dealing with practical urban questions, and we cannot expect anything like the success scientists have had in successfully martialling knowledge for the solution of security or space problems.

Nevertheless, there is some grounds for optimism. Social science continues to be more empirical and more policy oriented. The purist view

of legitimate scholarly work so eloquently defneded by Jacques Barzun (1968) has been replaced by the new academic ethos. And collaborative work increases - it is quite common now for distinguished scientists and social scientists to have common work projects without losing the respect of their colleagues in their own disciplines in the process. Consultantships to certain government, business, and labor add to the sense of relevance.

Just as the activities of professors have become more heterogeneous so have the functions of the university. Often without serious consideration, universities have accepted a variety of missions they have not sought out, but which have been thrust upon them.[1] In part, the success of academics in wartime activities - in O.S.S., the Manhatten Project and in the development of radar - had led to their being asked to take on new tasks, but success is not the entire answer. Other social institutions have simply not been available for these jobs or have defaulted on them already. In any case, these changes in the role of universities and university men since the war alter the prospects for new university knowledge in helping solve the problems faced by user agencies.

There are other compulsions besides the thirst of understanding that now direct universities toward increased involvement with user agencies. Like any organization, a university has a basic interest in its environmentment - the space in which their members live and work. Lately,

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[1]This is to be contrasted with one view that denies university involvements with the government and the military but happily accepts university engagement in social action ranging from providing remedial nursery schools for neighborhood children to expressing political opinion on such matters as the Vietnamese War. Another view supports academic involvement in selected situations which enhance the abilities of universities to achieve their goals.

for more and more universities, that environment has become threatened by decay and change in land use and function.

Universities located in rural areas, as many land grant colleges were, and the many which were originally established in pleasant middle class sections of town simply did not face these problems until the 1960's - and some limited number do not face it now. But most of the urban universities find they must take an interest in their local environments not just out of compassion or conscience but out of self-interest. Urban universities located in slums or near them find it difficult to attract able faculty and students.[1] Moreover, some observers of the university scene attribute part of student unrest to their dissatisfaction with their experience with urban life. Increasingly then, universities have come to have a stake in improving their local environments, a fact possibly first appreciated by the University of Chicago in its leadership in reconstructing the Hyde Park-Kenwood area. The same sorts of motiviations have guided the University of Pennsulvania's reclamation of its decaying neighborhood and the ambitious housing programs on M.I.T. and Harvard. As a consequence, the inevitable strains between universities and communities have diminished. The lessening of old strains, the continuing role of curiosity sensitized by considerations of domestic priorities, and the practical compulsion of

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[1] Medieval Oxford did not escape the unpleasantness of an urban location either. Things became so bad in the fourteenth century that a Royal letter, written probably on University instigation, was sent to the Sheriff complaining, " 'the air is so corrupted and infected' by the filth in the streets 'that an abominable loathing' (or perhaps 'ague') is 'diffused among the aforesaid Masters and scholars, 'a state of things aggravated by the practice of burning fat ... before their houses.'" (Rashdall, 1895, II, 389).

organizational maintenance suggest that universities are more prepared than ever to enter into mutually beneficial alliances with a wide range of user agencies. The real question remains: How? - through what ways and means that are effective, important and not destructive of other responsibilites higher education shoulders?

A Division of Labor Among Institutions of Higher Learning

If user agencies and universities are no longer destined to a relationship consisting of alternating periods of isolation and confrontation, neither are they equipped to be in continuous collaboration. The beginning of wisdom about the academic role in relation to user agencies is that the university in general cannot respond to all social ills and the university in particular varies widely in the assignments it might undertake. Some can do much; many can do something; and some can do only little.

The first step toward understanding how universities can help solve user agency problems is to match types of universities with types of tasks. Too often stressing their deep dissatisfaction with the quality of urban life, commentators have cast all universities into the same mold by calling on them, as a group, to redirect their efforts toward social action: toward altering housing policy, toward the solution of racial inequities and not least important toward solving the problem of the cities. This sense of urgency ought not to be lost, but it should be accompanied by an effort ot think specifically about the unique abilities of different kinds of universities for dealing with the problem at hand. Granting that distinctions have been blurred in recent years, the classical categories of

public, of private, and denominational support still give clues as to appropriate assignments.

Publicly sponsored institutions have, in our judgment, the greater share of urban scholarship and urban research, in part because their resources are greater and their financing more secure these days than all but a handful of private universities. A more compelling reason is their capacity to identify with state and local governments on the firing line. Nevertheless, private universities have their own contributions to make. Typically, they have a greater measure of flexibility and freedom and in certain circumstances find it easier to take on controversial and risky programs that involve direct observation and evaluation of experimental public programs. The MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies, for example, has frequently undertaken commentary that, however correct, was controversial and required consideration and response on the parts of policy-makers. More important, private universities may undertake long lead time research with a less immediate sense of obligation to report their utility. The important point to make is that the diversity of educational institutions by kind and placed in the United States is an advantage in developing relationships with user agencies - and suggests a division of labor to be exploited.

Universities are also differentiated according to size and according to the quality of their faculties, students and administrators. Small institutions obviously cannot take on the kind of big-scale operations that their larger colleagues can - because their resources are limited and because the balance of activities in small universities can more easily be

thrown askew by the introduction of a single large scale program. And a candid admission of quality, that universities realize but seldom acknowledge, is in order - the variation in the quality of intellectural resources different institutions can mobilize. A community college can carry out tasks a prestigious national university cannot - and vice-versa. Remedial education for disadvantaged students should not, for example, be assigned to professional members of the American Philosophical Society or the National Academy of Sciences.[1] Theoretical computer modeling of urban growth is not the forte of a humanities department within a liberal arts college. These variations in academic capacity need to be systematically discussed and acknowledged as part of the process of timely academic aid.

The implications of this distinction between national and local university participation with user agencies are fairly clear - at least in a general way. National universities should, to the extent that they become involved at all, direct their efforts to larger scale programs, those requiring multiple and higher skilled competences, and those involving problems of coordination among disciplines and professional schools. They probably should not attend to problems which are more or less idiosyncratic to particular regions or locations. This means that localities should perhaps be asked to pay through university financing for the tailoring of general solutions to meeting their specific needs, but they should not be asked to finance the development of major programs. These require more and

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[1]This matter calls to mind the remark made by a very able college freshman who happened to be taking elementary physics with a Nobel laureate. When asked how the course was going, he answered somewhat ruefully, "It's like using a very big steam shovel to dig a very little hole."

different support from business corporations, foundations and the federal government. This is the first principle for understanding how the Academy comes to work with the city.

What Universities Should and Should Not Do

A special principle is, granted differentiation by type, limitation by general institutional competence. Although we are apt to think that there is not societal problems for which some expertise is irrelevant, the fact is that universities do some things well and other things less so. Their members are not equally competent to deal with every social problem nor have they resources to deal with them all. Keeping in mind a general sense of what universities do well and what they ought to strive to do well, we can begin to indicate the sorts of activities that are inappropriate and appropriate for them to undertake.

(1) Universities should be loathe to compensate for inadequate public services even though the case can occasionally be made on educational grounds for doing so. Universities should not be in the business of relieving economic distress in their communities. They should not jumpt in to fill the breach for inadequate public housing. They should not attempt to provide for more equitable administration of justice. And they should not fill in for inadequate systems of primary and secondary education. It is not that these activities are unworthy but rather that the chances for improving public services decrease if these services are provided by universities. As we shall see, there are special circumstances under which every one of these problems might be appropriate for university

involvement but not as supplements to public services.

(2) Universities should not enter into local political activities in such a way as to upset local power constellations. To do so would be frivolous since universities cannot adequately or legitimately assume responsibility for political acts. If they corporately engage in local politics, they run the risk of paying a very high price indeed for doing so. Since the only redress politicians have against universities involve limitations of automony and support; it is in these two areas that universities will suffer most. Universities cannot insist on immunity from public pressure if they enter the political arena, and they cannot insist on continued financing if they engage in politics contrary to those who vote support to them.

(3) User Agencies and universities should hold each other accountable for the maintenance of high standards of performance. User agencies must begin to utilize greater precision in specifying their problems and the results they anticipate from entering into relationships with universities, and, in many instances, university personnel can assist in the skill development that is a necessary prerequisite to this task. In addition, since there has been a tendency for some user agency personnel to treat professors as sacrosanct, it is the responsibility of both user agencies and universities to destroy the myth that professors will be able to complete user agency tasks effectively just because they happen to be professors.

(4) Universities should develop more imaginative approaches to the utilization of personnel. The prevailing system of incentives and rewards

within universities does not adequately support faculty involvement in service oriented activities. As a result, significant adjustments will be required in career motiviation for professors if they are to take seriously the University's commitment to user agency involvement. In addition, to encouraging faculty member involvement within user agencies, universities should seek out and establish reciprocal relationships where persons with diverse experiences in a variety of different user agencies become an integral part of the University system. To the extent that these individuals have functioned effectively in and thoroughly understand the operation of user agencies, they can contribute significantly to the establishment of an effective alliance.

Another significant personnel resource within the University setting that we have just begun to tap is the students. Both university faculty members and user agency personnel for the most part have disregarded the talent, capabilities and usefulness of both undergraduate and graduate students in sharing a significant portion of the task involved in the conduct of research or training efforts for user agencies. By thoroughly integrating service components within graduate and undergraduate programs, a wide range of more effective utilization of student talent can be realized.

(5) Universities should emphasize inter-disciplinary research and inter-institutional collaboration. Universities must begin to develop ways of combining the traditional academic disciplines into effectively functioning multi-disciplinary research teams that are designed to focus specifically on particular user agency problems under consideration. In addition to

inter-disciplinary collaboration within an individual university, institutions of higher learning must begin to develop inter-institutional collaborative mechanisms whereby complementary talents from several universities can be brought to bear on specific user agency problems.

(6) Universities should utilize discretion in the selection of affiliating user agencies. Universities still have some credibility left, credibility that, for the most part, has already been used up by commercial consulting firms, and others who would seek to influence user agency policies and activities. Since this university credibility is a very special commodity that is based to a certain degree on the university's tradition as a center of knowledge and learning, it should not be squandered frivolously upon irrelevant topics or inappropriate ways. For example, there is the danger of user agencies trying to use academic personnel as bail out mechanisms for difficult user agency situations. This willingness to shift responsibility for informing the public about certain negative aspects of user agency policy has been far to prevalent in the past and may be even less useful as an approach during the period when universities and user agencies begin to collaborate more closely.

(7) Universities should resist involvement in activities for which they have no expertise. They should not, for example, have raised the hopes of those participating in the ghetto entrepreneurship program when faculties of business schools know altogether too little to have promised success. They should, quite clearly, begin studies to increase knowledge on these matters. Similarly, lending university prestige to haphazard and "instant" evaluation of urban programs jeopardizes the universities and does not produce effective and useful assessments.

These caveats are merely that. They are not intended to say that the university should retreat from involvement in general and in particular with user agencies. Instead, we recognize the unmistakable trend toward increasing university engagement in societal matters of all sorts. This trend toward greater involvement cannot moreover be attributed only to the thrusting of new responsibilities onto universities. Carl Kaysen is quite right in observing that universities have, since the forties, reached out for new activities not because they are newly conscience stricken but because these new activities have an intellectual justification and are of interest to university faculties. Kaysen's remarks alert us to the principle on which such involvements should be assessed. Universities are organized primarily for the production and transmission of knowledge and while this sounds excessively abstract and high minded, it does provide a rough criterion for judging which kinds of involvements make the most sense. In general, universities should readily accept those tasks which relate them symbiotically to their communities - local and national.

University health services provide a model for symbiotic relations between university and community. Medical schools depend for quality on the wide variety of patients supplied best by large city populations. University hospitals need large numbers of local residents to support the various services they offer and they depend for clinical services on a large base of practicing physicians located nearby. In turn, residents receive better medical attention than they would get at local hospitals and health stations. The quality of university hospitals is generally conceded to rest on the mutual support of medical training, clinical service

and health research. The mutual benefits derived by universities and communities from medical education and services are not vitiated by the many and justified complaints about the way the system actually works. We are fully aware of patients's criticisms about being "used" by university physicians, who themselves are unhappy about the quality of services they can provide. But problems that conceivably can be solved by more effective management do not falsify the main point. There are a variety of community-related activities which benefit both universities and communities and make their relations symbiotic. And it is these which should be sought out by universities. Some activities which use the distinctive capacities of universities and which benefit communities include:

(a) The provision of manpower adequately trained to meet national and local community needs for professional services and better trained to deal with distinctly urban problems. This does not mean that there should be at every university a department of urban studies or a center for urban affairs. There is a discipline which falls into that rubric which has academic legitmacy. As a consequence, urban departments in universities are apt to be an assortment of scholars - economists, sociologists, engineers, anthropologists and historians - who collectively look like the real thing but fail to provide an integrated approach to urban studies. Instead, there probably should be something like urban weighing of curricula: This would involve the representation of urban interests in most departments and professional schools which would provide for intensive training in urban studies but would leave the autonomy of these groups

undamaged. Urban institutions should have a greater urban weighing or curricula than the traditional land grant institutions which have their own emphasis on agricultural research and service. This is a start at least in producing students sensitized to urban problems and educated to some degree to see them in persepctive. It is by no means the whole answer.

(b) The development of prototype housing, schools, hospitals, or systems of transportation. Professional schools should find it both challenging and well within the activities they consider appropriate to design and bring to fruition models of the very best solutions to public problems. Many universities have operated primary and secondary schools designed as laboratories for educational research and educational training. The "Lab School" at Chicago and Hunter College's "Elementary School" have served these purposes and achieved some fame in the process. The building of prototype housing is less common but equally desirable both for the training of university architects and the development of better and less costly dwellings. We need not sketch out the idea of prototypes any further except to underline the necessity for experimenting with what the most competent academic judgment considers excellent.

(c) The provision of professional and technical assistance to groups - officially constituted and otherwise - undertaking the solution of specific problems. This will help to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and the practical realities and, hopefully, enhance the former by dealing with the latter. In due course, universities' capacities to produce trained manpower should also improve.

(d) The conduct of basic research of several kinds - traditionally sanctioned fundamental research on urban problems, the serious evaluation of the success of urban programs[1] and applied research designed to answer questions of special concern to local and federal authorities. The first two types of investigation are reasonably familiar and need no further comment. The last, however, provides interesting opportunities for concrete improvements in the urban condition. One form this research has already taken is the establishment of "Urban Observatories" which are designed to investigate problems selected jointly by responsible city officials and urban researchers and to provide for linkages between universities and city governments. Urban observatories seem to work best in places where the university is locally oriented and officialdom receptive to new ideas. They have the greater potential of comparative work - simultaneous investigation and report on the same urban problem and program as it effects different communities. This is the symbiotic town and gown relations in multiples.

Another example is the Institute for Governmental Services which operates within the University of Massachusetts as a linking mechanism between the University and various local and state governmental agencies throughout the Commonwealth. The primary task of the Institute is to facilitate the flow of resources from all three campuses of the University of Massachusetts to the citizens of the Commonwealth and, in addition, to

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[1] A sophisticated and useable research methodology for the assessment of programs' success exists in sociology and in economics. (See Hyman, et al., 1962.

develop collaborative service oriented programs among the various schools, departments, colleges and campuses within the University of Massachusetts. The Institute is involved primarily with local governments in such problem areas as planning and zoning; budgeting; property tax assessment; administration; transportation; organization design; personnel study; inventory or community resources, both physical and social; water and air pollution; taxation; urban renewal; the exploration of federal and state grants as they affect local government; the codification of statutes; sewerage and drainage problems and the social problems of local communities.

These simple proposals and the view of American universities varying capacities which underline them are not intended to satisfy any one of the main schools of thought on the role of universities in solving social problems. Those holding a conservative position on university functions will, no doubt, think these proposals represent one more instance of the subversion of the Academy. Others who see the university as an instrument for the achievement of radical social change will find them eclectic, inadequate and overly concerned with the survival of the university in its present form. The principle at least ought by now be clear: institutions help society by redirecting their own energies and programs and not by undertaking to substitute one institution for another. One can and should invoke the civilizing values of the university in supporting its cause, but these are not its only justification. If we are to make any headway in dealing with the complicated problems that our society faces, universities should not be deflected from their traditional goals. It is tempting to commit all universities to the task of

trying to make life more bearable, but that temptation must be resisted. And by resisting the temptation to undertake everything, we may be freed to do something. Helping user agencies in ways universities have functioned well before, will not immediately produce the cities we so urgently require. However, it may produce the institutions, both public and private, and the people to man them that, in turn, will build communities of quality, and beauty, and perhaps of peace.